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The Heart of a Lioness: The Fire at Animalkind part two

Mon, 2012-08-27 13:58 — Robin Olson

There's a certain quality only a rare few people have. It's a magnetic kind of energy that radiates from within, but can be felt by others. At times it smolders, belying the real power it can unleash, while other times there is no ignoring it. When that person enters a room, the airwaves seem to change and become electrified.

One such person is Katrin Hecker, the Director of [Animalkind](#) ^[1]. She's tall and tan with brilliant blonde hair. She's from Germany and has an unmistakable accent even after living here for decades. She's not shy about who she is, where she's from or what her passions are. Upon first glance she might come off as a bit distant or cool, but talk to her a few times and you'll sense her great heart.

Katrin operates in a no-nonsense manner especially when there's so much to get done. Since losing Animalkind's building after their sprinkler system destroyed the interior ([You can read more about that HERE](#) ^[2]), she has more than a lot on her plate.



©2012 Robin A.F. Olson. Katrin Hecker with the latest arrivals.

Katrin is creative, a painter way back when. She lived in New York City with her husband, but after too many years in the hustle and bustle, decided to move north to the small riverside town of [Hudson, NY](#) ^[3]. They bought an old church and set up their first home. Katrin wasn't sure what she wanted to focus her attention on, maybe design or get deeper into painting.

One day she realized she'd seen quite a few cats walking around town. **Her first thought was how sweet it was, seeing them dash down an alley or pass by her front door. She imagined she was living in a town that loved and cared for their cats as a community, otherwise why would there be so many of them roaming around?**



©2012 Robin A.F. Olson. [Panogram of one side of the temporary headquarters at the Warren Inn. Click to see a large size of this photo.](#) ^[4]

It didn't take long for her to realize that those cats were very thin, their coats ragged; some were injured or pregnant. Clearly none of them were being cared for and there was no rescue

facility or group in the town to help them.

Katrin rescued a black cat off the street and took it to the Vet. Her husband didn't mind as long as she didn't get out of hand and take in all the cats she saw. Katrin found a few more cats that needed help. They were all black. **Mischievously motivated or just plain brass, Katrin took in a total of eight black cats.** She hid them away in one room, where she'd set up as her painting studio, knowing her husband wouldn't enter the space. She let one or two out at a time and her husband never noticed they had more than just a few cats **until one night when it was very cold and the power went out.**

The wood stove was the only source of heat. One by one, the cats showed up to warm themselves by the fire. **The cats were out of the "bag." Katrin's husband was shocked, thinking he'd gone mad seeing eight nearly identical cats appear out of the woodwork, but she made no apologies. There was a serious problem in this town and something had to be done.**

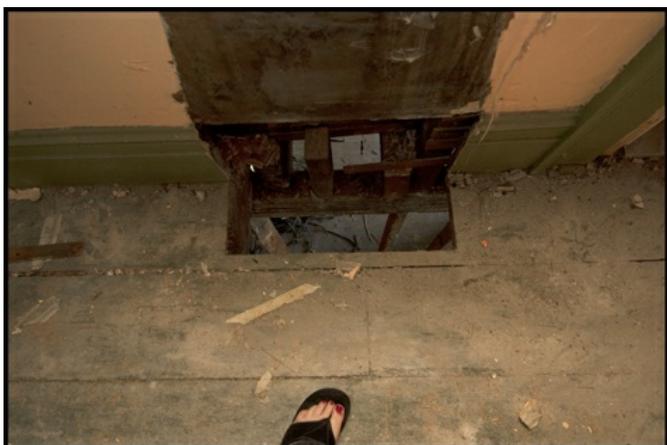
By 2000, Animalkind came into existence and ever since it's had a symbiotic relationship with the community. Katrin told me that she can't be like other rescues and say no all the time when someone asks for help. **She described some of the locals, who are down on their luck, struggling and just want to help a stray or their own cat. She finds a way to say yes, even if it means loading up her home with cats or reaching out to the community to help her help the cats.**



©2012 Robin A.F. Olson. Doors to the former surgical suite where they did all their spay/neuters.

Even at the clearly worst point of her life, with heartbreaking family problems, including illness and brain injuries to contend with and the loss of Animalkind's headquarters, she still has to help the cats. **She could have given up and walked away after the building was gutted. She could have walked away after her own home was badly flooded after Hurricane Irene badly damaged all the homes in her neighborhood.**

With all that's on her plate she finds a way to get up every day and figure out how she's going to put the pieces of Animalkind back together again and how she's going to get those poor cats out of their cages and into their new space as soon as possible.



©2012 Robin A.F. Olson. Watching my step.

Katrin led me through the front door of what was once a building filled with the sounds of volunteers working away, answering calls, scooping litter pans, feeding the cats; who were living freely in large open group areas. It was eerily silent now. I had to watch my step because the floors were stripped to the bone, covered with debris. The HVAC vents snaked across the floors having fallen from the mounts on the ceiling. The cheerily painted sheet rock was gone. **All that remained were exposed studs and wiring, the shell of what must have been a glorious Victorian home. I**

stood there. The heartache of loss was palpable.



©2007 Animalkind. Before the damage.

As we picked our way around the first floor, Katrin described each room. We passed the Adoptions area, then climbed to the second floor to see where their grand surgical suite was located. There are French doors separating the spaces, but no longer any walls on either side of the doors. A few stainless steel surgical tables and other equipment were shoved into a corner, dirty, but still usable. **However, most of what had once been there was long gone.**



©2012 Robin A.F. Olson. After the damage. The only thing that's recognizable is the teal bench.

It was a warm summer day and as we climbed the stairs you could feel the temperature rise slightly, along with the humidity. **The third floor held a secret—one that couldn't be helped. This is where the contagious cats lived...the ones with ringworm.** Even though they weren't supposed to have animals in the building, they had no choice. It was keep them safe or let them go. **It's not as though any rescue would knowingly take cats with ringworm and there was no way Katrin was going to put them down, either.**



©2007 Animalkind. Cats lounging before the disaster.

They did the best they could. The cats had the basics and no more. It was only for now. **It would get better soon, but the building had no electricity and without screens on the windows, the windows could only be opened a very tiny bit.** Most of the cats were flat from the heat but not in any danger at all.



©2012 Robin A.F. Olson. *Waiting.*

Katrin told me about their plans for the room as I looked around imagining how it would appear with fresh paint, new cat trees, comfy chairs. It was an enormous space with large windows overlooking the street on one side and an overgrown yard on the other. **They received a generous grant to re-do the yard into a perfect cat habitat so cats could go outdoors and still be within a closed space. They were going to put in benches and lots of plants and cute statues of cats playing. It was going to be so wonderful, if only it could happen soon.**



©2012 Robin A.F. Olson. *A skinny little lady comes over to greet us.*

And truly, that was the problem.

“Soon” seemed to be defined as “not any time soon.” You tell that to a room full of cats who are desperate for things to get back to normal.

The final part of my story introduces you to one amazing little kitten and shares some last-minute updates, promising news and more. Stay tuned...

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Comments

Mon, 2012-08-27 14:25 — [Connie & The Crew \(not verified\)](#) ^[16]

[Windows](#) ^[17]

I too struggled with the window issue, wanting to open them up on hot days to help cool off my kitten room. but having intact mothers who were starting to go back into heat or kittens full of energy and not so full of brains I always feared doing it.

Recently I saw on someone else's blog that they put up a baby gate in front of the window and I thought that was absolutely BRILLIANT! for the first time I was able to fling open a window (there are three but I only have one baby gate) and let them get a good whiff of the summer's night air.

Mon, 2012-08-27 16:31 — Barbara UK (not verified)

Why must bad things happen to good people? [18]

Why must bad things happen to good people? What an awful thing to happen. If wishes were money Katrin would have all the money she needs to rebuild Animalkind which looked such a beautiful place for the cats to be cared for in. I hope and pray that some good luck comes her way so she can start over and continue to provide loving care and shelter for the sick and stray cats that need it.

Does she have a Chipin - maybe like the one for Tater Tot - a dollar from everyone who can manage it ? A little from each person soon adds up tp something big.

Barbara UK

Mon, 2012-08-27 23:04 — Catnonymouse (not verified)

Put up a chip in - [19]

If a bunch of people could pledge just a bit maybe over a bit of time we could make a lot of difference.

Tue, 2012-08-28 16:25 — Catnonymouse (not verified)

I totally want to hear more! [20]

I totally want to hear more! I hope they are able to get back on their feet and back to helping cats. It looks from the before pictures that they had an amazing thing going!

Fri, 2012-09-28 15:50 — jmuwj (not verified)

Love part II and looking [21]

Love part II and looking forward to part III. Navigated here from Moderncat.net, btw.

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Links

- [1] <http://www.all-creatures.org/ak/index.html>
- [2] <http://www.coveredincathair.com/content/best-worst-thing-ever-fire-animalkind>
- [3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hudson,_New_York
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